

Dos & Don'ts of Interviewing

DO prepare your messages in advance and anticipate the reporter's questions.

DO keep answers short. You may do a television interview for 30 minutes, but the average sound bite is 10 to 20 seconds long, so be clear and concise.

DO communicate your messages. Answer questions, but don't be distracted from communicating your messages.

DO use firsthand examples and descriptive language. Communicating personal experiences can be dramatic and powerful. Use them as often as possible. Describe an experience with a patient or explain what influenced your position on an issue. Put statistics in meaningful terms, such as "two thirds" instead of "more than 60 percent".

DO use plain English. Keep the audience in mind, and speak in terms familiar to them. Avoid medical jargon, such as "prophylaxis," and "present to the emergency department". Don't use questionable humor (self-effacing humor is best), profanity, or any kind of derogatory language.

DO pause before answering. Take a brief moment to consider your response. Even for radio and television, this pause will seem thoughtful and natural.

DO answer the questions. It's best to answer even tough questions, or your credibility with the audience may be damaged. But remember, you're not obligated to agree to the interviewer's statements, and your mission is to deliver your messages.

DO speak in complete thoughts. The reporter's questions may be edited out and your response should stand on its own.

DO take the high ground. Always respond in a positive way, and turn negative questions or comments into positive statements. Reporters often will ask a negative question or plant a buzzword in a question to get you to repeat it, if only in denial. This makes for colorful quotes. Always respond by answering with positive statements and replacing objectionable words with more acceptable terms. Avoid criticizing or putting down your detractors.

DO question facts, if necessary. If confronted with findings or statistics you're not familiar with or you believe may be incorrect, say, "I'm not familiar with those statistics so I really can't comment on that matter" or "based on [cite other statistics], the most important thing to remember is [statement that communicates your message]". If asked, for example, about a report you haven't read, be sure and say so, but use the question as an opportunity to communicate your messages.

DO use body language effectively. To help people focus more on your messages, keep your arms loose, and gesture naturally. This will help you appear calm and confident. Don't clasp your hands together, cross your arms or legs, put your hands in your pockets, or adopt any posture that prevents you from moving naturally. Strive for a relaxed, animated face. Avoid sympathetic

nodding, which could be interpreted as agreement. Smile, raise your eyebrows, and use natural expressions.

DO treat news agencies fairly and DON'T tell one news agency what another is doing

DON'T lie or fake it. If you don't know an answer, say so. You can damage your credibility by speculating incorrectly. If you should know the answer but don't, offer to research the answer, and then be sure to follow up.

DON'T ramble or fill in the "pregnant" pause. Reporters often wait before asking their next question to encourage you to keep talking. Deliver your message concisely then stop talking and wait for the next question. Become comfortable with silence.

DON'T discuss hypothetical situations or unfamiliar matters. If asked about a situation or case of which you have incomplete information, or about a hypothetical situation, respond by discussing the issue instead. Say, "I can't respond to hypothetical situations, but if you're asking about the issue of [state the issue], it's clear that [state your message]".

DON'T argue or interrupt. You don't have to agree, but don't argue either. And don't interrupt. Other guests are another matter. You may need to jump in when another guest is talking to correct misinformation or to comment.

DON'T lose your temper. You can tell a reporter you prefer not to comment (explain why), but never get angry. In taped interviews especially, viewers may see only your angry response and not hear the question that prompted it. Avoid flippant remarks.

DON'T say "no comment". Use bridging statements to move the interview to areas that you can discuss and deliver your message.

DON'T say it if you don't want it used. Avoid going "off the record." If you talk with a reporter to provide background information, confirm with the reporter that you will not be quoted.

DON'T repeat a reporter's negative comment or question.

DON'T forget your message. Don't get wrapped up in answering the questions, remember why you are there, to deliver your message.